



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

#### Member Organizations

**The Umbrella Center for  
Domestic Violence Services**

Ansonia, CT

**The Center for Family Justice**

Bridgeport, CT

**Women's Center**

Danbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program  
United Services**

Dayville, CT

**Network Against Domestic  
Abuse**

Enfield, CT

**Domestic Abuse Services**

**Greenwich YWCA**

Greenwich, CT

**Interval House**

Hartford, CT

**Chrysalis Domestic Violence  
Services**

Meriden, CT

**New Horizons**

Middletown, CT

**Prudence Crandall Center**

New Britain, CT

**The Umbrella Center for  
Domestic Violence Services**

New Haven, CT

**Safe Futures**

New London, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**

Norwalk, CT

**Women's Support Services**

Sharon, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**

Stamford, CT

**Susan B. Anthony Project**

Torrington, CT

**Safe Haven**

Waterbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program  
United Services**

## Testimony Regarding

### HB 7027, AA Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019 and Making Appropriations Therefor

#### Department of Social Services Budget

#### Appropriations Committee February 16, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Senator Markley, Representative Abercrombie and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We thank Governor Malloy for recommending a less than 1% cut to domestic violence shelter and community-based services in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget in FY 2018 and we urge you to protect this funding. While we understand the fiscal challenges that the state faces, Connecticut's nonprofit human services system that provides help to victims of domestic violence is already under extreme stress. Providers struggle to meet the high demand for services and need to help keep victims safe. Further cuts to this system will be devastating and leave many victims and their children with no place to turn for help.

#### Current financial realities of domestic violence services:

In fiscal year 2016, **nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence** sought help at one of CCADV's 18 member organizations. One in seventeen (**1 in 17**) of those **victims was housed in emergency shelter** because they faced physical danger and had no other safe place to go. Of the 2,325 people in shelter, **1,031 children were housed in emergency shelter with a parent**. Sixty-nine percent (**69%**) of **kids staying in shelter were 6 years old or younger**. Victims and their children receive life-saving services including counseling, support groups, safety planning and court advocacy.

Meeting the emergency housing needs of victims continues to be a challenge. There are 227 domestic violence shelter beds in the state and they are consistently full. **Shelter utilization has increased 119% over the past 8 years**, with the average shelter capacity at 57% in FY 2008 compared to 125% in FY 2016. Shelter capacity has increased largely because the **average length of time that a victim remains in shelter has increased by 77%** over the same time period (26 days in FY 2008 compared to 46 days in FY 2016). In many instances, to meet this growing need, families have to "double-up" in a bedroom or rooms that would otherwise be used communally for entertainment or relaxation end up converted into bedrooms. Neither option is ideal nor beneficial for victims seeking to overcome trauma. When the shelter space itself is stretched to the maximum, victims are housed in local hotels - a costly and unsafe option.

Increased knowledge about services through public awareness efforts and coordinated outreach efforts through programs such as the Lethality Assessment Program (a partnership with law enforcement), result in more requests for services.

(OVER)

The length of time that victims remain in shelter has increased because victims are presenting to shelters with a host of complex needs ranging from severe financial abuse and a complete lack of access to monetary resources, to serious medical conditions or behavioral health needs. All of these challenges require additional supports from the domestic violence provider. Fewer recovery options and a lack of affordable housing continue to present obstacles that are growing increasingly difficult to overcome in a timely manner resulting in longer shelter stays and overflow. Until stable, appropriate housing can be identified and secured victims either stay in shelter or return home to their abuser – a potentially dangerous option.

The FY 2016 statewide domestic violence service data also shows sharp increases over the previous fiscal year in other community-based service areas at least partially supported by DSS funding including:

- 5% increase in hotline calls
- 10% increase in community services
- 13% increase in support groups
- 15% increase counseling services
- 19% increase in community education and prevention

### **What would cuts to domestic violence services under DSS look like?**

Funding cuts to an already stressed domestic violence service system will result in fewer victims served. Some possible options currently being considered to address any potential funding cuts are:

- **As many as 40 fewer advocates/certified domestic violence counselors statewide** – this means less counseling, fewer support groups, and reduced advocacy to assist victims with obtaining other basic human services to support their transition out of their abusive relationship
- **Reducing or eliminating 24/7 staffing of shelters** – this means victims will be left alone in shelters for certain period times with no staff safety supports
- **Reducing or eliminating hotel placements** – some domestic violence organizations spend as much as \$20,000 per year to house overflow victims in hotels until shelter space opens; reducing this funding will mean that some victims simply will not be able to obtain immediate, safe housing and instead will only be provided with community-based supports such as counseling
- **Limiting transportation for victims** – domestic violence service organizations will reduce available transportation for victims seeking to relocate to a safe place or attending medical or dental appointments, substance abuse or mental health treatment, job training, etc., all essential human services that help victims transition out of shelter
- **Reducing community-based services** – this will mean fewer victims served statewide
- **Reducing or eliminating community education and primary prevention activities** – Less knowledge about what domestic violence is and how to get help will mean persistent cycles of abuse and more victims feeling stuck in their situation

Overall, given the existing pressure on domestic violence services statewide following years of flat or reduced funding, further funding reductions will mean minimal comprehensive services for victims that will ultimately have a negative impact on their long-term safety and stability. **Services will be limited in scope to focus only on triaging immediate needs and shelter may not be an option for some victims facing physical danger.** More victims will feel stuck in their home with their abuser resulting in diminished victim health from on-going stress and trauma, compromised emotional and social well-being of children in the home, and increased safety risks for victims and their children.

Again, we urge you to protect funding that keeps victims of domestic violence and their children safe.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Liza Andrews  
Director of Public Policy & Communications  
[landrews@ctcadv.org](mailto:landrews@ctcadv.org)